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LASH LARUE

WESTERN

JUNE

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NO. 29



IN THIS ISSUE

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LASH LARUE WESTERN •

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66 99

Lash LARUE in

The SILVER MASK and the BLACK STAR

THE SILVER MASK AND THE BLACK STAR MEANT ONLY ONE THING IN THE OLD WEST—DEATH! THAT IS UNTIL THE CHIEF MARSHAL ORDERED A DRAGONET TO BE LAID ACROSS THE FRONTIER, HEADED BY THE TWO-GUN KING OF THE BULLWHIP, ROVING MARSHAL LASH LARUE!

MARSHAL TRAINING SCHOOL

THE CHIEF MARSHAL HAS ASKED THAT EVERY DEPUTY MARSHAL, WHETHER HE'S FINISHED HIS TRAINING OR NOT, BE RELEASED TO JOIN THE COUNTRY-WIDE MANHUNT FOR THE WILD KILLER IN THE SILVER MASK, CAPTAIN!

YOU CAN TELL THE CHIEF, LASH, THAT HIS ORDERS WILL BE CARRIED OUT!

A TOWN HALL MEETING AT ROCKY POINT...

HIGE OF YUH HOMBRES TO CHECK YORE GUNS AT THE DOOR! HOW DDBS ALL YORE BELONGINGS INTO THE CENTER OF THE ROOM!

ANYTHING YUH SAY, SILVER MASK/ONLY DON'T SHOOT!

NOW LINE UP AGAINST THE WALL WITH YORE BACKS TO ME---ALL OF YUH, PRONTO!

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IT'S ONLY BECAUSE I DO KILL ALL MY VICTIMS THAT THEY'RE SO AFRAID OF ME, WHICH MAKES ROBBING THEM SO EASY, SO...



...I AIM TO GO ON BUILDING UP MY REPUTATION AS A KILLER!

JOHNNY STAR STRIKES AGAIN!



A FEW DAYS LATER, IN THE HILLS OUTSIDE LARADO...

EXCUSE ME, STRANGER, BUT CAN YUH TELL ME IF I'M GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR LARADO?

YUH SURE ARE! YO'RE THE TENTH MARSHAL I'VE SEEN HEADED THERE TODAY! WHAT'S COOKING?



THEY PROBABLY WERE ALL DEPUTY MARSHALS, LIKE ME, ON THEIR WAY TO THE CHIEF MARSHAL'S HEADQUARTERS! I'VE BEEN ASSIGNED TO WORK WITH THE GREATEST MARSHAL OF THEM ALL, LASH LARUE --AND I'M SURE LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING HIM!



THE SILVER MASK WIPED OUT AN ENTIRE TOWN HALL MEETING, INCLUDING THE MAYOR, A FEW DAYS AGO AND THE CHIEF MARSHAL IS UP IN ARMS! HE'S ORDERED EVERY MARSHAL TO DROP WHAT HE'S WORKING ON AND CONCENTRATE ON CATCHING THIS KILLER! HE'S MURDERED TOO MANY PEOPLE ALREADY!

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME! I'VE ONLY JUST STARTED!



I WISH YUH LUCK BUT I DON'T SEE HOW YUH CAN EXPECT TO ROUND UP THE SILVER MASK WHEN THE LAW DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE!

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE, BUT WE DO KNOW THAT HE'S GOT A BLACK STAR TATTOOED ON HIS RIGHT HAND...



...AND THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH REASON FOR ME TO BRING YUH IN FOR QUESTIONING!

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THEY KNEW THAT MUCH! NOW I AM IN A SPOT!



BUT AT THAT SECOND...

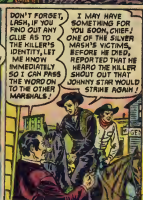
OOF!

GOOD BOY, DEVIL! YUH ALWAYS COME THROUGH!





LATER, AT THE CHIEF MARSHAL'S OFFICE...



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR NICK TRAVERS, I THINK I KNOW WHERE HIS HIDE-OUT IS! I WAS WORKING ON THAT BEFORE I WAS TOLD TO REPORT HERE!

THEN WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? LET'S HIT THE TRAIL, RUSH!



SWORTLY AFTER...

NICK HAS A SNACK HIDDEN IN THE BRUSH AT THE TOP OF THIS MOUNTAIN, BUT THE TROUBLE IS, I THINK HE CAN SEE ANYONE WHO APPROACHES!

IN THAT CASE, NOW ABOUT ME GOING UP THIS WAY AND YOU COMING UP FROM THE BACK SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN? IN CASE HE DOES SEE ME, I'LL KEEP HIM BUSY FIRING AT ME WHILE YOU REACH HIM FROM BEHIND!



SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO ME, LASH!

REMEMBER, WE'VE GOT TO TAKE HIM ALIVE! WITHOUT HIM, WE'VE NO CHANCE OF EVEN IDENTIFYING THE SILVER MASK!



BUT AS THE PHONY DEPUTY REACHES THE MOUNTAIN...

CLIMBING UP THIS MOUNTAIN IS A SLOW JOB...



...SO I SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE REACHING NICKY WAY BEFORE LASH DOES BY USING THIS SECRET PASSAGE!



IN FACT, I SHOULD EVEN BE ABLE TO CATCH MY OLD BOSS, NICKY TRAVERS, OFF GUARD!



MINUTES LATER...

JOHNNY STAR! WHERE'D YUN COME FROM?

NEVER MIND THAT! BUT I CAN TELL YUN WHERE YOU'RE GOING---



---TO YOUR DEATH! AND I'LL JUST PLANT THIS SILVER MASK TO POINT THE FINGER OF SUSPICION AT THE SILVER MASK!



NOW TO GET BACK AND CLIMB UP THE REGULAR WAY! THIS MURDER WILL NOT ONLY KEEP THE LAW FROM FINDING OUT MY IDENTITY BUT ALSO WILL KEEP LASH FROM EVER SUSPECTING ME, SINCE HE WILL FIND THE BODY BEFORE I DO, MAKING HIM MY ALIBI!



AT THE SAME TIME...



THOSE GUN SHOTS HAVE ME WORRIED! I HOPE NICKY TRAVERS DIDN'T SPOT JACK AND KILL HIM!

IT'S NICKY TRAVERS WHO'S BEEN MURDERED! AND THAT MASH MAKES IT LOOK LIKE THE WORK OF THE SILVER MASK!



THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, LASH! WHEN I HEARD THOSE SHOTS I WAS AFRAID NICKY HAD PICKED YOU OFF!

TRAVERS IS DEAD, BUT YOU MUST HAVE SEEN THE MILLER ESCAPING ON YOUR WAY UP!



I DIDN'T SEE ANYONE!

BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THERE ARE ONLY TWO WAYS OUT OF HERE, THE BACK AND THE FRONT, AND SINCE HE DIDN'T PASS ME, HE HAD TO PASS YOU!



I DIDN'T THINK OF THAT, BUT I CAN WORK MY WAY OUT OF THIS EASY ENOUGH!



WAIT A SECOND! THIS LOOKS LIKE A TRAP DOOR!

THAT'S WHAT IT IS! AND JOHNNY STAR WOULD HAVE KNOWN ALL ABOUT IT SINCE HE USED TO BE ONE OF TRAVERS' HENCHMEN! COME ON! NOW THAT WE KNOW HE'S AROUND, WE'VE GOT TO CATCH HIM!



BUT WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE!

WE'LL GRAB EVERYONE AROUND HERE AND HOLD THEM FOR QUESTIONING! DON'T FORGET, WE CAN IDENTIFY HIM BY THE BLACK STAR ON HIS RIGHT HAND!











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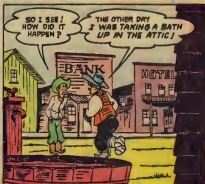
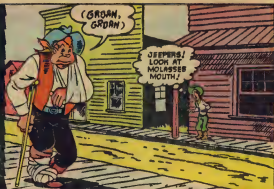


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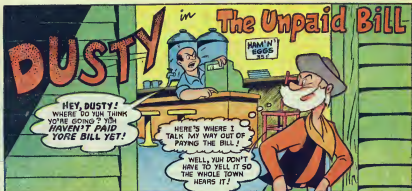
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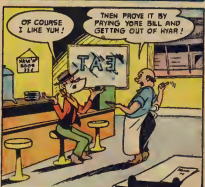
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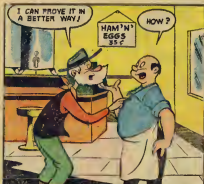
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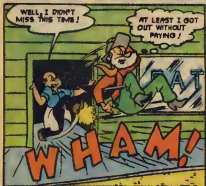
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LASH LARUE WESTERN







Lash LARUE
and
THE HIDDEN VALLEY MINE!

WHEN ROVING MARSHAL LASH LARUE, KING OF THE BULLWHIP, IS ASKED TO GUARD A SECRET MAP LEADING TO A HIDDEN GOLD MINE, HE DOESN'T REALIZE THAT IT ALSO LEADS DIRECTLY TO A ONE WAY TRAIL SURROUNDED BY TROUBLE, DANGER AND DEATH!

MAPES, A GRIZZLY OLD PROSPECTOR, NERVOUSLY WALKED THE DESERTED STREETS OF LARADO.

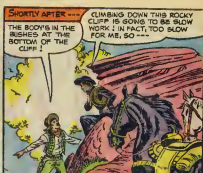
I REASON IT'S ONLY MY IMAGINATION,
BUT EVER SINCE I DISCOVERED THAT
GOLD WERE IN THE HILLS A FEW
DAYS AGO, I IMAGINE EVERYONE
IS WATCHING ME...

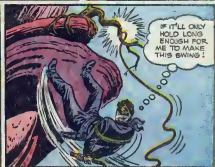
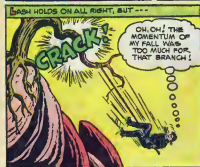
---ESPECIALLY THAT GREASY
CLAIM JUMPER, SKULLHEAD
DEEGAN. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE
MENTIONED TO HIM THAT
I STRUCK IT RICH.

THIS IS
THE PLACE
FOR LOCKING
FOR!

CHIEF
MARSHAL
OFFICE











- ★ FOR RIDING THAT RIPS ACROSS THE RANGE LIKE A PRAIRIE FIRE
WATCH THIS MAN...
- ★ FOR GUN-TOTING JUSTICE AGAINST VICIOUS OUTLAWRY
WATCH THIS MAN...
- ★ FOR THE BLAZINGEST WESTERN-ACTION THRILLS OF ALL TIME

DO NOT MISS A
SINGLE ISSUE OF

**HOPALONG
CASSIDY**

WESTERN
MAGAZINE!



TEN GALLON TEX...

ALL INN!





THEY HALTED the stampede toward dawn. Men would remember the wild nightmare whenever cowpunchers gathered around the campfire. Two immense herds clashing and mixing in a stampede set off by a lightning storm. Now the man of both outfits—H Brand and Double K—were rounding up the strays, edging them toward the flat land near the narrow canyon where the herds had been halted.

Tom Joiner of H Brand and Grim Blackburn of Double K faced each other at the point of the mixed herd. They inspected the brands without speaking before the longhorns were shunted apart. Men of both outfits kept their gun hands close to their holsters as they kept the nervous cattle in line. H Brand men remembered the drive of the year before when their stock came into Abilene four hundred head short and two men left dead on the trail. While Double K, which had started out with little more than a jag of longhorns, had hit the market with a sizeable herd. Nothing had been proved, but it was the talk of Abilene for weeks.

At the head of the line, Tom Joiner turned from a close inspection of a brand that was unmistakably a Double K, burned deep and clear into the hide. His hard blue eyes challenged Grim Blackburn's dark shifty frown.

"Crim, some of your brands look pretty fresh for full grown beef that's been on the trail for two months," he began. "If these were calves—"

"What yuh drivin' at, Joiner?," cut in Blackburn, pushing back his hat to hang by the throat thong. "If yuh got somethin' on your mind, spill it!" His shoulders crouched forward in defiance, his eyes wary as a cat's. Tom knew he had put his finger on Blackburn's sore spot.

"Just this, Blackburn," he declared crisply and evenly. "Back in Texas, before we hit the trail for Kansas, every head of beef in H Brand was branded and ear notched. Now I see ear notched longhorns with your Double K burned into them. How did they get there?" His clear voice rose in solemn accusation as Blackburn started in surprise. "I'll tell you how!"

Blackburn's gun hand stopped midway to his holster when his eye caught Tom's hand already resting lightly on his Colt. Tom's eyes riveted on Crim as he continued. "At night, while the outfit slept, you been cutting out ten, twenty head and driving 'em up near yours. Next morning you'd overbrand them and mix them in with your herd. You've been doing it for weeks, but I caught on just last night. That's why you been holding back and sticking so close to H Brand. You swindled us last year, but now I've got the goods on you!"

Blackburn's suddenly paled face told Tom he had struck home. Swift punishment was the price of rustling on the trail up from Texas. Weeks and months alone with the dangerous herds and endless sky made men hard. Bleached bones and shattered skulls were mute warnings to would-be rustlers.

"You lie!" Blackburn shouted, but his desperation betrayed him like a cornered rat. Tom flushed, but bridled his anger.

"I ought to gun you down, Crim," he spat through tight lips, "but I'm giving you a running chance. Turn back all the ear notched cattle and stay away from H Brand until we hit the Kansas market. I figure on a two day ride."

Blackburn nodded quick acceptance of this generous proposal. But his mind was already busy with a scheme to loosen Tom's grip on him. He knew that Tom had only to speak to set him swinging on a rope.

They mounted, heading for the hundreds of H Brand longhorns marked Double K that Tom had allowed to go through before he made his accusation. The cattle were gathered at the head of a long narrow canyon, restless and nervous under the overcast sky.

"She's going to be a hard job of cutting out the notched cattle," observed Tom. Blackburn grunted in reply. Tom continued, "I'm heading over there." He pointed to an opening in the opposite canyon wall. "Might be a passage through so we can channel off my cattle without more of a mixup." As he reined over, his back was turned to Blackburn for a moment.

With the speed of a forked tongue, the rustler drew and fired at close range.

An iron bar whanged Tom's head just above the ear. Fireworks seemed to shoot off before his ears as echoes of the shot bounced between the canyon walls. He heard low thunder. Dizzy, holding tight to stay on his horse, wondering why Blackburn had not fired again to finish him off, he looked over his shoulder.

What he saw behind him tore the fog from his eyes. Blackburn's shot had stampeded the nervous longhorns! The rustler was digging spurs in terror stricken flight. Tom saw instantly they would be trapped in the canyon if they could not make the opening he had started to scout. Almost by themselves, his spurs jogged his horse into flight. The stallion raced away like the wind in pursuit of Blackburn. Behind them, the broad line of longhorns filled the canyon from wall to wall, trumpeting in wild confusion, pounding the earth in deadly swiftness.

Blackburn was headed like an arrow for the opening across the canyon. He was almost sure to make it before the herd blocked it off. But Tom had only an even chance. Almost at the edge of safety, Blackburn turned and flung a wild shot at Tom. The bullet whistled past Tom's head as he spoke to his stallion in the special words he saved for times of trouble. He pulled alongside the outlaw, stood up in the saddle and leaped, dragging down Blackburn just as they crossed the break in the rocks. The longhorns trampled thunderously beyond them, raising a boiling dust cloud in passing.

The two men fell heavily to earth. Through a red haze of fury Tom struck out at Blackburn, who had landed on top of him, knocking out his wind. A red gash broad as a fist opened on Blackburn's cheek.

"I'll do yuh," gasped the rustler, reaching for his gun. The holster was empty. His gun had whirled away in his fall. It lay gleaming a few yards away. Unarmed, the outlaw looked at Tom, breathing hard in anger, his Colt solid in the holster. Terror gripped him and unhooked his knees. He began to sink to the ground, expecting Tom's bullet between the eyes.

"Get up, you dog, get up!" Tom was shouting at him. "Maybe you'd kill me if I had no gun, but I don't shoot defenseless men." Unbuckling his gun belt, he tossed it on the ground. "But I do beat the living daylight out of rustlers. Get up and get your needings. Put up your fists!"

As Blackburn rose a grim smile curved Tom's lips. His rock hard knuckles crunched into the meaty nose. The heavy rustler spun around and fell. Tom followed up, knicking his boot against Blackburn's thrashing feet. The rustler rolled over away from him and regained his feet. He made a desperate leap for his gun. His hand had barely gripped the butt when Tom's boot cracked down on his wrist, sending the gun into a clump of bushes. Behind them, the whole herd had passed by into the far reaches of the canyon. Blackburn wriggled out and tried to run but was hauled back by Tom's iron grip.

The tall young cowman turned him around and slapped his face again and again with his open palm until both cheeks were a dull red. Then he drove home a full shouldered blow to the jaw that felled Blackburn like an ox. Tom stood over him, panting.

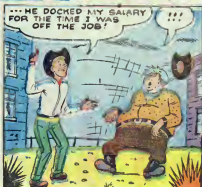
He buckled on his gun belt. Then he led Blackburn's horse to the fallen outlaw, boosted the rustler to the saddle and tied his hands to the pommel. He mounted his stallion, Blackburn's reins twisted tight in his hand.

"CRIM," he said to the swaying rustler as they pulled out, "we're heading back to my outfit. Those notched ear longhorns are coming into the Abilene stockyards under H Brand, where they belong. And you're coming in as my prisoner. It's a good thing for you we're only two days ride from the market. When my boys hear who did them out of bonus money last year . . ."

The rustler's eyes flickered in fear.

"... and you're going to tell them so they'll know. I'll protect you till we hit Abilene. Then I'm turning you over to the law! They know what to do to men who change brand marks on the Texas trail!"

THE END



MOLASSES MOUTH

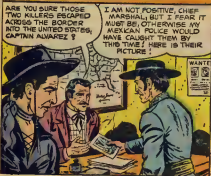


MAKES SENSE!





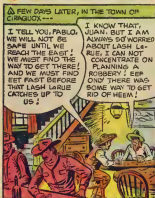
AT THE CHIEF MARSHAL'S HEADQUARTERS—



THE ONE ON THE LEFT IS PABLO HURRAGO! THE OTHER IS JUAN DIEGO! I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOUR MARSHALS WOULD KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THEM AND LET ME KNOW IF THEY SEE THEM!

WE'LL DO EVEN BETTER THAN THAT, CAPTAIN ALVAREZ...













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